

A Potpourri for Church Elders

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by Arthur J. Clement

Introduction

As a pastor who has spent quite a few years in the parish ministry I have found that very few men elected to serve as Church Elders or Deacons feel themselves qualified for the task. And with good reason. While they are to be closely associated with the pastor and help him with the spiritual affairs of the congregation they have not received the formal training their pastor has. It is one thing to know the Christian faith, and quite another to be able to intelligently and effectively apply the principles of the faith to others.

Many a situation has been lost in dealing with cases of delinquency in the congregation simply because the right word was not spoken at the right moment. Too many times Elders have been guilty of accepting excuses from delinquents when they should have been forcefully calling the delinquents to repentance. One of the aims of this material has been to give the Elders suggestions for dealing in various cases of church discipline. It is suggested that this material be used in the pastor's meeting with his board. The material could be read and discussed. One large section is devoted just to the matter of how to answer various excuses brought up by delinquents. Another section, at the end, gives ideas for formulating letters to delinquents.

By no means should we consider that the collection of this material is complete. It is only a beginning. It is hoped that others will offer suggestions that could be incorporated. The best way to begin is to begin, and this is the beginning I have chosen toward compiling material of practical use to my own Board of Elders. As time goes on, I shall no doubt add to the size of this volume. A potpourri is miscellaneous collection. This is meant to be a miscellaneous collection of helpful hints and suggestions and information for Church Elders.

Why Go to Church?

God wants His Holy Word to be dispensed to people by the public preaching of it. At the same time, He wants hearts to receive His word by faith. In fact His Word preached to sinners, converts sinners, giving them true faith in God. And therefore we go so far as to conclude that the Christian Church is to be found on earth *where the Word of God is preached*, and the Sacraments are rightly administered. Yes, the Word of God must always be preached, and hearts must be attuned to this Word, gladly hearing it, willingly obeying it.

Mark 16:15,16,20 "And He [Christ] said unto them, Go ye into all the world *and preach the Gospel* to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned...*And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.*"

Isaiah 55:10 "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall My Word be that goeth out of my mouth; *it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*"

Matthew 7:24 "Therefore *whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.*"

John 8:31 "Then said Jesus: *If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*"

Romans 10:13-17 "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they *hear without a preacher?* And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good*

things! But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*”

Matthew 13:23 “But he that received seed into the good ground is *he that heareth the Word, understandeth it;* which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Luke 11:28 “But Jesus said: Yea, rather, *blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.*”

John 5:24 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, *He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life.*”

John 6:63 “The words that I speak unto you, *they are spirit, and they are life.*”

Matthew 11:15 “He that hath ears to hear, *let him hear.*”

1 Peter 1:23 “[We were] born again...*by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*”

John 17:17. “Sanctify them *through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.*”

2 Peter 1:19 “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; *whereunto ye do well that ye take heed,* as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

2 Corinthians 5:20 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though *God did beseech you by us:* we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Acts 2:41 “Then they that *gladly received his word* were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

It is clear from Holy Scripture that God wants His believers to go to God’s own house for public worship...there to hear God’s Word preached, and there to worship God with other believers to the mutual strengthening of all who participate.

2 Chronicles 30:8 “Be ye not stiffnecked, but yield yourselves unto the Lord *and enter into His sanctuary;* and serve the Lord, your God.”

Ecclesiastes 5:1 “Keep thy foot when *thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear* than to give the sacrifice of fools.”

Hebrews 10:23-25 “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) And let *us consider one another* to provoke unto love and to good works: *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;* but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

If it were not God’s will that His believers go regularly to church, to public worship, would He then have commanded the building of the TABERNACLE [for worship, in the wilderness], and the TEMPLE at Jerusalem [the permanent house of worship]? Furthermore, the Holy Spirit also inspired many of the Psalms to be written for use [e.g. as hymns] in the public worship service

The Holy Scriptures afford us excellent examples of devout church attendance and deep love for God’s House:

JESUS’ OWN EXAMPLE, AND SURELY WE WANT TO FOLLOW OUR SAVIOR IN HIS WAYS:

Matthew 26:55 “I sat daily with you teaching in the temple.”

John 4:16 “*As His custom was,* Jesus went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.”

DAVID'S EXAMPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT HE WAS A HOLY SPIRIT-INSPIRED WRITER:

Psalm 27:4 "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: *that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.*"

Psalm 84:1,2,4,10 "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!...*My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God...Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house...For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*"

ELKANAH AND HANNAH [parents of the prophet Samuel] MADE REGULAR TRIPS TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

1 Samuel 1:3-7 Bible Reading.

ANNA, A VERY AGED WOMAN, WHO WAS PRIVILEGED TO SEE THE INFANT CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE, AND ALSO SIMEON, A VERY AGED MAN:

Luke 2:27,36-37 "And he came by the Spirit *into the temple...* And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser:...And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, *which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*"

JOSEPH AND MARY WENT TO JERUSALEM TO THE TEMPLE EVERY YEAR FOR THE HIGH FEAST OF THE PASSOVER. OTHERWISE THEY WORSHIPPED IN THEIR LOCAL SYNAGOGUE AS THE CUSTOM OF THE JEWS WAS:

Luke 2:41 "Now His parents *went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.*"

THE CONGREGATION AT THESSALONICA:

1 Thess. 2:13 "...*ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us...*"

God has told His Christians GROW in grace and knowledge of Him, and to KEEP THE FAITH. This is done through the Word of God especially as it is publicly preached by a true and faithful pastor, who expounds texts from the Bible to God's people and applies the Scriptures to their lives.

Ephesians 4:11-15 "And He gave some [to be] apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine* by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ..."

2 Timothy 3:13-17 "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;* And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Luke 24:32 "Did not our heart *burn within us while He talked with us by the way and while He opened to us the Scriptures?*" [NOTE: this was the wholesome reaction of the two disciples of Emmaus to Jesus' words of instruction. The Lord still talks to hearts through the sermons of His ministers, preached from the pulpits in our time.]

Acts 8:30ff. The evangelist Philip said to the Ethiopian Eunuch who was riding along in his chariot reading from Isaiah chapter 53: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" To this, the Eunuch replied: "Now can I *except some man should guide me?*" To help people

understand the blessed Word of God and thus to come to the saving knowledge of Christ is why we have trained and called ministers of the Word.

CHURCH offers us blessings and benefits we cannot get otherwise:

1. Jesus promises to be there in church with us with His blessings, with His presence:
Matthew 18:20 “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, *there am I in the midst them.*”
 2. Church helps to prepare us to be witnesses in the world by teaching us God’s Word. It was the plain truth of the matter, that the congregations in the time of the apostles provided the witnesses for Christ:
1 Peter 3:15 “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.
 3. Church is where the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are offered and performed:
Acts 2:41-42 “Then they that gladly received his word *were baptized:* and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and *in breaking of bread,* [the Lord’s Supper] and in prayers.”
1 Corinthians 11:24-26 “*This do in remembrance of Me...*As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.”
 4. Church is where the Christians’ offerings are gathered for use by the Lord in various ways in His wonderful kingdom of heaven, on earth:
2 Corinthians 9:7-8 “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so *let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.* And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work.”
1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of the week, *let everyone of you lay by in store* as God hath prospered him.”
Philippians 4:16-18 “For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, *an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.*” [Note: here we have an actual case of a Christian congregation taking up a collection for the apostle Paul in his work. The gift he received was not from a lone individual, but from the whole congregation at Philippi, which was intensely interested in Paul’s work and personal welfare.]
Mark 12:41-44 Jesus showed great interest in the offerings the people brought to the temple. Have we any reason to believe that things have changed with our Lord?...”
And Jesus *sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.* And He called unto Him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”
- Regarding our offerings for the Lord, which we as a congregation bring regularly to His house and present to Him: Far be it from us to minimize the importance of one single offering that is given. What one Christian cannot do along, many [a congregation...a synod] can do working and giving together.
5. Church affords us a fine opportunity to testify our faith regularly before others and with others, and thus by confession of faith, by hymns, by prayers, by communing at the Lord’s Table together, by confession of sins together and receiving the Lord’s absolution together through the pastor, and by listening together to the preached Word of God, and by a kind word and a handshake before the service or afterwards, we have the opportunity to greatly encourage and strengthen each other in the faith and in Christian Doctrine and in Christian love.

Colossians 3:16 “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; *teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

Acts 2:42,46-47 “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God...”

Hebrews 10:24,25 “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; *but exhorting one another:* and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Ephesians 4:3 “Endeavoring to keep *the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace.”

6. Church affords us opportunity to do charitable works to fellow Christians, both in the congregation and without the congregation.

Galatians 6:10 “Let us do good unto all men, *especially unto them who are of the household of faith*

Romans 12:13 “Distributing to the *necessity of saints.*”

Quotes Regarding Attendance at Church

LUTHER: “God’s Word cannot be without God’s people. On the other hand, God’s people cannot be without God’s Word.”

WALTHER: “Church membership makes us stockholders in a firm that possesses and distributes vast treasures. A Christian congregation is a court that is supreme in its particular sphere of jurisdiction, and each one who joins it is a fellow judge. The Christian congregation is a prayer league, and the church member shares every one of its prayers. A Christian congregation is Christ’s spouse here on earth, whose powers and privileges every member shares.”

WALTHER: “But alas! also many members of a Lutheran congregation do not prize their membership properly; they regret that so great a sacrifice of time and money is required. Theirs is the privilege to attend worship and to partake of the Lord’s Supper, but they rarely make use of it. Theirs is the privilege to take part in the meetings of the congregation, to join in the discussions and to cast their vote, but hardly ever do they make use of it. They look upon their membership as a burden rather than as an honor. Such people betray their spiritual blindness.”

G. BOARDMAN: “Going to church will not save man, but not going to church will damn him.—He that doth not hear the Word of God to his renovation shall hear it to his condemnation.—If hearers were better, sermons would be better.—The empty pew kills inspiration, smothers hope, and dulls the fine edge of zeal.—The reason that rain keeps people away from the church shows why the church is necessary.—The world is dying for want, not of good preaching, but of good hearing.” [Quotations and Illustrations For Sermons, Concordia]

SWINNOCK: “Some have indeed been converted by reading, as Luther, Augustine, and others confess they were; but most commonly it is by hearing that men’s souls come to live, Rom. 10:14. There is a blessing for readers, and there may be a fish or two caught in the net that is let down in a heap; but that is rare. It is not the net lapped up together, but haled out at length and spread all abroad that bringeth in the draught; so it is the spreading out of the Word, the dilating on the matter in hand, which usually catcheth souls.” [Quotations and Illustrations For Sermons, Concordia].

WALTHER: “No, you cannot convert yourself when you will, but only when God wills and where God wills. Therefore, because you cannot convert yourself nor set the hour of your conversion, be sure to do it when the Word comes to you and do not harden your heart. Do not wait, willfully and contumaciously, till your death. Therefore it is also no trifle needlessly to stay away from church at times, even if it be but once. Many think, Oh, it will not depend upon that one time that I miss church. Ah, poor soul, do you know for a certainty that to-day a sermon will not be preached which was most specially intended and prepared for you, through which God desired to save you from a great danger threatening your soul, to rekindle your dying faith, to give you strength to overcome a strong temptation? See, you have closed the door at which your

God stood and knocked; you have missed the hour of grace; perhaps it will never return.
[Quotations and Illustrations For Sermons, Concordia].

LOUIS CASSELS (UPI Senior Editor): The following article titled: "Many Clergymen Discouraged By Apathy of Lay Members" appeared in the June 20, 1971 edition of the State Journal, Lansing, Michigan: "With some notable exceptions, America's clergymen are a pretty discouraged lot. They haven't lost faith in God. And they remain convinced that Americans desperately need the spiritual values and the perspective on life that can be gained from true religion. But a great many of them are frustrated because they feel unable to communicate their faith and concern to the laymen who make up their congregations. A surprisingly large number—43% of the Jewish rabbis, 32% of the Protestant ministers, and 23% of the Catholic priests—are so disheartened about their work they have seriously considered leaving religious life. These insights into the attitudes and feelings of today's clergy come from a recent nationwide survey by the Gallup organization. The findings have been made available to religious leaders and commentators in a report entitled 'Religion in America, 1971.' The demoralization of the clergy is reflected not only in the high percentages who have considered giving up the ministry, but also in their responses to a question about whether religion is an increasing or decreasing influence in American life. Six out of 10 expressed the view that religion is a waning influence on human conduct. When asked to give reasons for their discouragement, *they cited declining church attendance* [emphasis ours]; widespread evidence of public indifference to moral and spiritual values; growing materialism; and lack of public concern about righting the wrongs of contemporary society. More than a third of the Protestants and Catholics and more than half the Jews who have seriously considered quitting their careers said they feel frustrated by their apparent inability to communicate with their people, or by a lack of interest and devotion among members of their congregations. The crisis in clergy morale clearly does not stem from a collapse of personal faith. Belief in God was confidently affirmed by nearly 100% of the priests, 99% of the ministers and 98% of the rabbis."

Miscellaneous

TODAY (March 1950): The following editorial is titled: "When the Dead are Quick." "A Chinese pastor, addressing a group of American clergymen, was bewailing the sorrowful predicament of his church. Half of his church was living and half of it was dead, he said. 'But the trouble is,' he added, 'the dead part is more active than the living.' We may smile at his manner of expression, but more sober reflection will incline us to the belief that perhaps he was giving a fitting description of many a congregation here in the homeland. Let us make sure that those who are 'active' in our churches are not spiritually dead. Evangelism always begins at home. It may be that some of our most important witnessing needs to be done to those who are most active in our local congregational programs."

Ex-Lutherans

TODAY (December 1946): "Claiming and Reclaiming" by Lawson F. Knight: "Did you ever stop to think what a tremendous mission field we have in the great number of 'ex-Lutherans' in our country? This thought was recently brought home to me by a statement in the columns of TODAY which revealed that of the 100,000 people in Philadelphia who claim to be Lutherans only 46,000 are listed as members of any congregation. One of our professors once said: '*There are more Lutherans in the United States who are not members of any congregations than Lutherans who are.*' [emphasis ours]. My own observations seem to give support to that assumption. In my hometown in South Georgia for instance, there is no Lutheran church of any kind. The nearest Missouri Synod congregation is about 250 miles away. Yet I know of five Missouri Synod Lutherans who are living in that town. No doubt, all of us could think of detached members who are floating around the country and who, unless a real program of reclamation is pursued, will soon join the growing ranks of ex-Lutherans...The very term *ex-Lutheran*, however, implies a reason for that *ex*. There is some underlying cause that has never yet been dealt with. Some of these reasons are listed below. The list makes no claim to completeness, but gives some of the main causes for drifting which have come to the writer's attention. It is suggestive rather than exhaustive. 1) Mixed marriages, with resulting neglect of the means of grace and gradual spiritual starvation, produce a large number of ex-Lutherans. Mixed marriages, in which the Lutheran is staunch and loyal, have been the source of many a member of the adult confirmation class, it is true. But the Lutheran party in all too many cases gives in; he doesn't want to 'argue about religion'; and the result is that both parties neglect church. When both have drifted, however, it is quite often easier to gain both, especially when there are children involved. 2) Arguments or misunderstandings with a former pastor are often given as a reason for neglecting church. While it should be a basic supposition that most of our

clergy, past or present, have used Christian principles and common sense in dealing with members, and while the brethren are certainly entitled to the charity which the Eighth Commandment requires in defending them, speaking well of them, and putting the best construction on everything, it must be admitted nevertheless that mistaken judgments, tactless dealings, legalistic approaches, and plain misunderstandings are possible. And once the problem has been clearly stated, and the Word of God has been brought to bear upon it, the matter can be adjusted. 3) Unsolved spiritual problems account for some backslidings. A member does not find in the sermons, or neglects to seek from his pastor, the solution which Scripture gives to some problem which troubles him. Whether it is a problem of the intellect, such as evolution, or one in the matter of God's dealing with one Christian differently than with another, the unsatisfied soul drifts away elsewhere in search of the answer to his question. 4) Cases of church discipline, divorce, lodge membership, and the like, account for quite a number of ex-Lutherans. And these present the most difficult of problems. The power which the devil wields over his victim in a particular sin is reinforced by the pride of the human heart. Sometimes it is humanly impossible to break down that pride which has moved a man to leave his church and which prevents him from returning. The possibility remains, however, that a different community, a different congregation, or a different pastor, with the possibility of a fresh start, may be a factor which the Spirit uses, together with the Word, to reclaim the backslider. 5) Moving into a different community where the Lutheran Church is not represented, or failure to secure a transfer to the congregation in the new neighborhood, also produces drifting, backsliding Lutherans. But the very presence of a new mission, or the supplying of the Word and Sacraments in the community, is often the solution of the problem. We rejoice when instances are reported of people traveling scores of miles every Sunday to attend services. Their loyalty to the Word is as a shining light. But exceptions do not change the rule. Many people simply have not attained to so high a degree of loyalty and will begin to drift as soon as they move a distance from the church...One final note about winning back ex-Lutherans: Never give up. While there is life, there is hope. If one approach fails, there is always another. If one man falls, God may use another. It may take twenty years for the conviction to ripen that we expect in one year. *Duty is ours; results belong to God.*"

TODAY (October 1947)

'Twas A Sheep

'Twas a sheep, not a lamb, that went astray,
 In the parable Jesus told;
 'Twas a grown-up sheep that wandered away
 From the ninety and nine in the fold;
 And out on the hilltops and out in the cold
 'Twas a sheep that the Good Shepherd sought;
 And back to the flock and back to the fold
 'Twas a sheep that the Good Shepherd brought.

Now, why should the sheep be so carefully fed
 And cared for still today?
 Because there is danger, if they go wrong,
 They will lead *the lambs* astray;
 For the lambs will follow the sheep, you know,
 Wherever they wander, wherever they go.
 If the sheep go wrong, it won't be long
 Till the lambs are as wrong as they!

So still with the sheep we must earnestly plead
 For the sake of the lambs today!
 If the lambs are lost, what a terrible cost
 Some sheep will have to pay!

Concerning Church Discipline

WALTHER (Law and Gospel): "When I reprove a person and he becomes angry with me, he shows that he is not a true Christian; for a Christian receives reproof meekly, even if the reproof is uncalled for. He is not greatly surprised that people should charge him with wrong-doing, knowing that no person who is still in his natural state can be expected to do good. If he knows himself to be innocent of the charge, he says, God be praised! I am not guilty. It is an important

remark of Luther when he states that those are certainly no Christians who do not feel the gnawing of their sin, are not wrestling with it, and are even apt to ask, Why, what wrong am I doing? He who speaks thus is in a sorry condition. Were he a true Christian, he would say: 'Indeed my sins go over my head. That was my plight, not only in the days when I was not converted, but it still is my plight. I do not believe this merely because I read about it in my Bible, but I experience every day what a wicked thing my heart is and how frail my Old Adam.'"

WALTHER (Law and Gospel): "Many pastors and congregations make mistakes in applying *church discipline*. They may be dealing with a drunkard who readily professes sorrow over his sins, as these people usually do. An inexperienced minister is easily deceived by such a profession. The drunkard may be suspended from church-membership and placed under surveillance for three months. Presently some brother brings the good news that the drunkard has kept himself sober all that time, and the minister, decides that the drunkard is now converted, while in reality he is still quite a godless person. Beware of being deceived thus! The same may happen when a habitually profane person who has been admonished by the congregation quits cursing for a while. Or take the case of a person who is negligent in church attendance, who, therefore, certainly is not a Christian. After he has been brought before the congregation he may come to church for several successive Sundays. But does this outward act alone make him a Christian? By no means; any godless person is able to do what such a one is doing. The aforementioned persons must be made to realize that no Christian acts like them; if he does, he cannot possibly be in a state of grace...Or take the case of tardy communicants who will come to the Sacrament once again after the minister has reprovved them. If he is satisfied with that, he is guilty of commingling Law and Gospel."

FRITZ (Pastoral Theology) quoting Harmann (Pastoral Ev.): Regarding directions to be observed by those who are called upon to admonish others:

- 1) When speaking to a person who has sinned, we should always keep in mind the ultimate purpose of doing so—the spiritual welfare of our neighbor and the glory of God. A sinning person should never be exposed to the ridicule and scorn of the ungodly. It should always be evident that the admonishing brother is not prompted by malice, hatred, and vain glory.
- 2) Hidden sins should not be made public unless the third degree of admonition demands it. Anyone who reveals a hidden sin himself becomes an offender and needs to be taken to task. Nor is it necessary that every public sin be *at once* publicly dealt with.
- 3) One should be sure of the facts in the case before proceeding to take a brother to task.
- 4) Due attention should be given to time and place of admonition, Prov. 25:11; 1 Samuel 25:36,37.
- 5) One should always remember one's own faults and shortcomings and not put on the airs of a perfect saint. Deal with your erring brother as a poor fellow sinner.
- 6) One who would correct the faults of others ought not to be guilty of the same or similar faults. How could one expect to make a good impression upon an erring brother if he fails to correct his own greater faults while at the same time he is denouncing the comparatively minor faults of a fellow sinner? Luke 6:41,42.
- 7) One should never be too timid nor too severe in dealing with an offender. The purpose of bringing an offender to a knowledge of his sins and to true repentance should be kept in mind.
- 8) Various conditions in reference to an offender should be given careful consideration: his degree of intelligence, his knowledge of Scripture, his personal make-up, his physical condition, his experience in life, his environment, etc. *Not all persons can be dealt with in the same manner.*
- 9) A reprimand should be given accordance with the sin that has been committed. For a less serious offense a sinner should not be reprimanded as though he had committed one of the greatest and most serious crimes.
- 10) Whenever an offender is sorry for his sin or has, without having been rebuked, made amends (or if by rebuking him others who deserve more consideration [*e.g.*, weak Christians] would thereby be rebuked), no reprimand should be given at all or only in a very mild way.
- 11) Witnesses who are called in should be such as are acceptable to the offender, not such as are quarrelsome, tattlers, offenders themselves, or otherwise incompetent but rather good friends, in whom the offender has confidence and before whom he will not be ashamed to admit his wrongdoing.
- 12) The various degrees of brotherly admonition should, if necessary, be repeated. Christ, in Matthew 18:15-17, tells us *how* we should proceed, *not how often* the offender should be admonished. That it is quite in accord with the Savior's directions that an offender be repeatedly

admonished before we proceed to the next degree we learn from Matthew 18:22, where He tells us that the erring brother is to be forgiven not only seven times, but seventy times seven. Cf. Luke 17:3,4.”

FRITZ (Pastoral Theology): Regarding the question *Who may be Excommunicated?*

Only such a person may be excommunicated:

- 1) as can be held responsible for his actions (not an insane or feeble-minded person [or one possessed of the devil]);
- 2) as calls himself a brother (or sister), I Cor. 5:11; 1 John 2:19;
- 3) as is a communicant member, I Cor. 5:13;
- 4) as is known to have committed a mortal sin, that is, a sin by which a man falls from grace or ceases to be a believer, I Cor. 5:11; John 13:21,22, or has been convicted of denying a fundamental truth necessary to salvation (deity of Christ, Vicarious Atonement, resurrection of the dead, etc.), John 8:42-46; Matt. 22:23,33; Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10,11; 2 John 7-11;
- 5) as in spite of all admonition persists in his sin or doctrinal error and thus shows himself to be an incorrigible sinner and unbeliever, Matthew 18:17;
- 6) as has by the congregation or its authorized representatives been *unanimously* (also any woman of the congregation may enter her protest against the excommunication) declared to be one who deserves to be excommunicated.

And regarding the matter of *A Protest Entered Against Excommunication*.—“No resolution of excommunication may be passed as long as one single person protests against it. A case of excommunication should be so clear that any Christian can see the justice of it.—It may occur, however, that a person protests without sufficient reason, or it may even be evident that a protest is entered because of disrespect of the Word of God and the express command of Christ, Matthew 18, or out of undue regard and partiality toward the offender, or out of mere stubbornness, and the like. In such a case the protesting party must first be dealt with before the original case can be disposed of. Either the protesting party must see the justice of the resolution and vote in favor of the excommunication, or the protesting party, because of a flat refusal to obey the express command of the Lord, must be excommunicated.”

Further, regarding the matter of *A Christian’s Attitude Toward an Excommunicated Person*.—“Any intercourse or familiarity with an excommunicated person which might give the impression that such a person is still considered a Christian should be avoided (2 Thess. 3:15 speaks of the attitude toward an erring brother before, not after, his excommunication); for of such a one Christ says that he should be unto us as a heathen man and a publican, Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 6:9,10 Christians should be careful not to give the impression that they are making light of such a serious matter as excommunication or that they are partaker of other men’s sins.—Any association with an excommunicated person which excludes such a wrong impression is permitted.”

A Layman’s Testimony

Going to Church...and what it means to me, a plain man in the pew.

Written by a member of Christ Lutheran Church (Quoted from TODAY, Sept ‘50)

It is Wednesday night. I am rather tired from the excitement of a busy workday. Leaving the subway at Northern Boulevard Station, I feel relieved to get away from the noise and the crowds which strain all of us who have to work in the big city. As I turn leisurely in the direction of 58th St., my eyes focus on something which seemingly I have never noticed, though I have gone this way hundreds of times.

To my left—up in the sky, over the building tops—gleams *a golden cross*, illuminated by the setting sun of a parting summer’s day. To the *golden cross*—that is where I want to go, and as I follow it I realize that I do not feel tired anymore, my worries seem to melt away, I am happy. It reminds me that I am a pilgrim on the road to eternity, and now, looking at it, I feel like going home. Going home—*the golden cross* guiding me.

“Why do you go to church?” People have ever so often asked me that question. “Why do you *not* go to church has always been my answer. Unless you go to church you do not know what you are missing. I have never felt that I do God a favor by going to church; rather, God does me a favor by permitting me to come to His House. Whenever there is a church service and I am present with all the members of my family, that indicates that God has given me: first of all

health—which enables me to come; second, *time*—my working hours do not make it impossible for me to participate; and third, *earthly means*—that is clothing and transportation.

If at times I review the past, I cannot help but count the years in terms of “Going to Church.” At first I used to come alone with my wife. After a little while we could bring a baby along, and as the years went by my family grew and every time “Going to Church” brought different experiences, which have registered in my mind so deeply that I do not want to part with them. The precious minutes which passed while “Going to Church” always occupied my mind by taking inventory how God had preserved us another week, how He had provided for us in body and soul.

Times may have changed...but one thing never has changed—we still are “Going to Church.”

“Going to Church” has patterned my life *positively*. The Word of God gives me an answer to all my questions and problems. I know, through the grace of God alone, where I came from and where I am going, and all my social and family affairs are definitely and finally merged into the road to the *golden cross*. My church, my home, my work are the platform of my life. Though I put “my work” last, it enables me to take care of my family and fulfill my obligations toward my church.

When I say “obligations toward my church” I do not mean “money for God.” I cannot see that God needs my money. God who has made heaven and earth, God who has created me and kept me to this day, who gives me health and income, does not need my money, because all we see and all we have is the Lord’s. Money will never appease Him or put me in a favorable position. However, in His wisdom He has given me an opportunity to prove myself faithful in whatever He bestows upon me.

As one of His children I have no difficulties in deciding how much to give to an appeal which comes from my church or any institution. I have a verbal agreement with the Lord concerning all with which He entrusts me—I will return the tithe. The tithe set aside from my income enables me to help in the spreading of the Gospel through my local church, through missions and all the institutions of mercy which my church supports and operates by the divine command of our Lord Jesus Christ. Giving certainly is living, and if it should be comparatively much that I have given during the year, it only means that God has been exceptionally good to me, because all I return is the tithe—and the bigger the amount of my tithe the bigger the amount of what I keep for myself.

...The Word of God, delivered by the servants of the Lord, our pastors, makes us friends and brethren. Wouldn’t it be nice if...we came closer to each other by serving the Lord our God TOGETHER?—adapted

Miscellaneous Items

The Slighted Invitation (Quoted from TODAY, Sept. ‘50)

A certain church prepared a service of worship and invited whosoever would to come. And it sent forth a letter saying to all its friends and members: Come, for we have made all things ready. And the majority began with tiresome repetition to make excuses.

The first said: “All the week I labor hard and unceasingly. On Sunday I must needs rest in bed until noon. I pray thee, have me excused.”

Another said: “I have bought a car, and on Sundays my family doth make a great clamor to be taken into the country. Pray, have me excused.”

And another said: “I have children, and, behold, by the time they are dressed and fed and dispatched to Sunday School, I have readied the end of my Sunday morning enthusiasm, and to get myself ready is more than I can manage. I pray, have me excused.”

And another said: “The members of my family are peculiar; they must needs eat on Sundays, the same as on other days. And if I go to church, will the minister send someone to prepare our dinner? To sit down to dinner an hour late is impossible, for we are not of a mind to subdue the call of the stomach to the needs of our immortal souls. I pray, have me excused.”

And many other excuses of equal impressiveness did the people make. Yet did these same people raise a great hue and cry and make bitter lament when war and crime and corruption and all manner of evil did flourish greatly. Especially did they resent the resulting high taxes. And with one accord they began to make complaint, saying: “Why is not something done about these things?” *The Courier*, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Wanted—The Missing Letter!

Dxar Frixnd:

Probably thx most important tool in my work is my typxwritxr. It is an xxcxllxnt machinx, but it has dxvxlopxd onx dxfxct: onx of thx lxttxrs is missing, and this sxriously handicaps mx in my work.

I am ablx to usx this machinx, you sxx, but thx absxncx of that onx lxttxr provxs to bx vxry xxaspixrating at timxs, bxcausx whxn you need it, it isn't thxrx.

I thought I would usx this as a mxans of txlling you that whxn you arx not prxsxnt, our church is vxry much likx my typxwritxr: wx arx sxriously handicappxd by thx absxncx of vxxn onx mxmbxr.

Thx thought of your bxing absxnt makxs us all unhappy. So, plxasx, for your own good, won't you makx it a point to bx prxsxnt for vxry sxrvicx now that thx roads arx bxttxr, to sharx in thx blxssings and makx us all fxxl vxry glad.

Xxpixcting you thxrx,

Your Frixnd (*Quoted from TODAY, March '50*)

Conviction is not repentance. It is one thing to be awakened at five o'clock in the morning, and it is another thing to get up.—Selected.

Attendance at the Lord's Supper

"When Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Altar He said, 'This Do.' Christ did not say, Omit this, or Despise this, but 'This do ye.' Truly, He wants it done, and by no means neglected or despised. 'This do ye' is His command.

"This, though, is not a commandment of the Law, but a gracious invitation of the Gospel. Refusing the Lord's invitation a Christian would show himself ungrateful toward His Savior.

"But Christ not only said, 'This do ye,' but He added, 'as OFT as ye drink it in remembrance of Me.' The Lord instituted the Sacrament of His Holy Supper to be partaken of REPEATEDLY...If a friend visits you but once a year, is he calling, on you often? Certainly not. If you go to the Lord's Supper but once a year, are you going often? Most decidedly, not." Quoted from a tract by Rev. John H.C. Fritz)

The Backslider (*Quoted from: The Approach to the Unchurched*)

The backslider...was once in the Church. He has once known a Savior's pardoning love, but has crucified afresh his Lord. He was once active in the work of the Master, but he is no longer in His service. He tells us boastfully: 'Oh, Pastor, I was once a regular churchgoer; I taught in the Sunday school; I held an office in the Church. Believe it or not, I have already spent a lot of time and energy in the Church. But then things happened.' And it is here that we are treated to a great variety of 'lame-duck' excuses: "Sunday is the only day when I can take the family out for a ride into the country—I lost my job and suffered great reverses in business—I haven't been feeling well for a long time—and, do you know, an officer of the Church came to my house one day and tried to tell me how much I should give to the Church; that turned me off. If the Church only wants my money, it can go plum to hell!"

We open the Bible and show our backslider a photograph of himself in God's Book. We give him Prov. 14:14: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Heb. 10:38: "The just shall live by faith; but if any, man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Rev. 2:4: "I have somewhat against thee"—church of Ephesus—"Because thou hast left thy first love."

We proceed to tell our spiritual defaulter, "it is faithfulness unto the end that counts. Faithfulness during the first half of your life and unfaithfulness during the second half of your life spells eternal ruin. Let me ask you a few questions: Do you remember the day of your confirmation? I'm sure you do,—that day on which you publicly and solemnly professed loyalty to Christ and His Church even unto death? And now, what has happened? What is it that has enticed you away from an active life in the Church? You stated a reason a few moments ago; but do you really think that that's a valid reason for breaking away from the Church, a reason acceptable to God?"

We show him the way of return: "it is not too late to come back to Christ and His Church. A backslider really does not deserve to be taken up again into fellowship with God. But I am happy to report to you that our God in heaven is a most gracious God. His Son Jesus Christ died

for all sinners; He died for you; He died for your sins of neglect; He died that you might live, live in His kingdom here on earth and in His kingdom of heaven. Your case is not hopeless. Here is Jer. 3:12: 'Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you.' You know the story of the ninety-nine and one—how the Good Shepherd left ninety-nine sheep to search and find the one which had strayed away from the fold. You know as well as I do the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He returned to his father's home, and was received most royally."

It will take time to reclaim the backslider. It has been our experience, that, as a rule, it's easier to convert a man who has been without Christ and Church all his life than to bring a lapsed Lutheran back to his former church life.

My Diary (Quoted from A Bit of Honey, W.E. Thom)

Monday night: We went to see some friends at Popularville; The roads were bad and the rains made the roads slippery. This just made the trip more thrilling. We had a good time.

Tuesday night: Went to club at Gadesville. Still raining and cold, but you know, these meetings help one so much. I just don't feel right when I miss one.

Wednesday night: This is prayer meeting night, and I am really afraid I'd catch cold. Besides, damp weather is so bad on my arthritis. Our pastor will have a fair crowd anyway and he won't miss me.

Thursday night: Went to Hickory Hill to the basketball game tonight. A light rain was falling when we left home, but we had a bang-up good time and would you believe it, I never felt those arthritis pains at all.

Friday night: Felt bad all day. Still raining, but I risked it out and went to the show. It was wonderful. Ronald Swoonheart and Tessie Twinkle Toes in their latest production, "Happy Though Married."

Saturday night: Went to town a shopping today.

Sunday night: It is time for church, but I feel so-o "poorly." I am afraid to get out since I have been out all week. Somebody else will take my place.

Self-Examination Questions

1. Do I merely believe in Jesus Christ, or do I have *faith*? Do I only assent with my intelligence to that fact that Jesus lived and died, and rose from the dead—or do I entrust myself completely into his hands for my eternal salvation?
2. Standing on either side of the altar of our church is a seven-branched candle stand. If one watches these candles closely he will see that some burn steadily and brightly. Others keep flickering—sometimes they seem almost on the verge of going out altogether. Christians and church members are much like these candles. How does my faith and my church-life appear to others? Am I steady—dependable—burning bright with faith and good works, or do I look much like the candle that seems about to go out?
3. Do people hear me all the time making excuses why I cannot come to church, or serve on a committee, or board or participate in other ways in the work of my church?
4. Do I feel well-grounded in the Bible and Christian doctrine? Can I speak intelligently to others about my faith? Is it hard for people to stump me by asking me questions about my religion?
5. How often do I attend church? Is it every Sunday (barring sickness, and emergencies)? Is it every other Sunday? Is it every third Sunday? Is it once a month? Even LESS than that?
6. Church-going is to a great extent a habit (and a very good one to get into at that). If people see me in church this Sunday will they know from my churchgoing habits that I won't be seen again for the next Sunday or two?
7. How hungry am I from week to week for God's Word? Is it easy or difficult for my sinful flesh to talk me into 'skipping' church?
8. Do I try to absorb the pastor's sermon and think on it during the week and apply it to my life, or does it completely escape me?
9. Do I really feel that I am a sinner who needs and wants to hear the pastor tell about the Savior Jesus Christ Who died for my sins?
10. Which applies to me: a) I can hardly wait for the church to celebrate the Lord's Supper for I know I am a sinner, and I love to be told my sins are forgiven___ or ___ b) It doesn't bother me at all to skip the Lord's Supper. It is very unimportant to me.

11. When was the last time I received Holy Communion? Last month? The month before? Three months ago? Four months ago? Was it about a year ago?
12. Do I criticize and minimize the efforts of others while doing little or nothing for the Lord myself?
13. Do I go to hear my pastor preach Christ, or do I go to criticize his sermons and find fault?
14. When the church offers special evening services (Lent, Thanksgiving, Advent, etc.) am I in the habit of coming to church or do I figure these services are for the other person: Do I figure that I am not obligated to come?
15. How is my attitude toward my religion, my Lord, my church? Is it lazy?—Indifferent?—Enthusiastic?—Interested?—Belligerent?—Haughty?—Friendly?—Stuffy?—Out-going?—Zealous?—Easily offended by others?
16. Do I teach my children to love and respect and obey their pastor and Sunday school teachers and all others in authority over them?
17. Do I pray regularly for my pastor and for our missionaries?
18. Do I volunteer my services?
19. Am I a wrecker or a builder?
20. Do I give as I am able, that is, as the Lord has graciously prospered me?
21. Do I give cheerfully out of love to my Savior...or...do I give because I HAVE to give something?
22. Do I give regularly or only sporadically? If I were to look in my envelope box right at this moment, would I be 'caught up' in my giving or would there be 'old' envelopes there, representing Christian giving that has not been performed, and worship services not attended?
23. Do I consider Christian giving a joy that I look forward to doing?
24. Have I stopped to consider that God uses me through my offerings to spread the Gospel of the kingdom abroad?
25. Do I wait till Sunday morning and then ask the question: "Are we going to church today?"
26. Do I attend the Lord's Supper regularly, or am I found to be sitting in the pew while others go to the altar to receive strengthening for their faith?
27. Do I use the talents God has given me in a way best for Him?
28. Do I live each day to Christ, watching carefully how I act, and what I say? Do I appear as a Christian before the world?
29. Jesus said: "Whosoever shall offend (cause to stumble in the faith, or hurt the faith of) one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about, his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea." Have I been giving my children a bad example, perhaps even keeping them out of Sunday school and church and thus hurting their faith? Do I lead my children into the Bible at home?
30. Have I ever been instrumental in bringing another soul to Christ the Savior?
31. What spiritual heritage am I leaving others? Am I giving others an incentive to be good Christians?
32. Have I come to a place in my spiritual life where I know for certain that if I were to die today I would go to heaven?
33. How does this statement apply to me: "The empty pew kills inspiration, smothers hope, and dulls the fine edge of zeal?"

Excuses Offered by Delinquents and Answers for Them

1. Those who are always too busy, or too involved in worldly matters such as having fun...too involved and too busy to attend church.

Matthew 6:25,31-34 "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?... Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Matthew 10:33 “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me: And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me.” [NOTE: If Jesus said we are not worthy of Him if we put members of family ahead of Him, we certainly are not worthy of Him. If we put fun and pleasure, or even work ahead of Him either, for these things are even of less importance than family.]

Matthew 13:44-46 The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” [NOTE: Jesus and salvation, and the gospel which proclaims it, are important than anything else in this whole, wide world.]

Luke 12:15-21 “And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many, years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Matthew 6:19-24 “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and I rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Psalms 127:1 “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Exodus 20:3 “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

Deuteronomy 8:10-14 “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord Thy God for the good land which He hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I commanded thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up and, thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 “And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”

1 Timothy 6:6-12 “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For

the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”

Mark 4:19 “The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

2 Peter 3:10,11f “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.”

1 Peter 4:7 “The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”

Luke 21:34 “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with...cares of this life.”

Luke 11:28 “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.”

Psalms 119:161,162 “My heart standeth in awe of thy word. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.”

Proverbs 13:13 “Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed.”

1 Corinthians 15:58 “Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 5:15 “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

2. For people who are always making excuses for not attending church, for not contributing, for not involving themselves in the Lord’s work.

ANSWER: Do you think the Lord is looking for excuses for your not doing something which you very well know He has commanded you to do in the first place, and even has placed great blessings on the doing of it? God looks to your life for performance, not for excuses.

ANSWER: Do you honestly think that the excuses you give for not attending public worship and for not supporting the Lord’s church and the Lord’s work with your offerings would ‘hold water’ if you were right now standing before the bar of His justice?

3. For people who say: “I haven’t the time now to come to church, etc., etc.”

ANSWER: To say that you do not have TIME to come to church or to work for your church, is to say that the THINGS OF THIS WORLD count more than the things of God. [Where your heart is, there will be your treasure also...Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust doth corrupt...]

ANSWER: My friend, if you say that you have no time for religion now, consider this, that you will not have time for religion when you are dead, and your soul stands before God. “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.” (Isaiah 55:6)

4. For people who say: “I have no money to give to the church.”

ANSWER: To say that we have no money to give to the church for the Lord’s work is probably stretching the truth a bit. We all no doubt have something. What you probably mean is that you do not have a large enough income at present to give the amount you would really like to give. But all of us surely have something. It is the proportion that counts, not the amount. And even if we have not one cent that we can give, why should that stand in the way

of our attending public worship. We still can worship God with our presence, with our heart. Later when our economic condition changes, we can then worship him with our treasure also.

ANSWER: To say that we have no money at all to give to the Lord is to say that the Lord first of all has not given to us. Can we really say this?

ANSWER: We feel that we cannot come to church because we have not the money to give as we would like to give? Have we forgotten that Christ commended the widow for casting her two mites into the treasury of the church?

5. For people who say: Why does the church worry about me? Why don't they let me alone so I can go my own way? I don't care what happens to me!

ANSWER: But God does! "Ye are not your own, for you are bought with a price." I Cor. 6:20. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under the foot the Son of God...It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10:29-31.

6. For people who say: "I am good enough. I don't need to go to church. I feel I can get along and be good enough without going regularly to church."

ANSWER: But not nearly good enough for God. He says: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." Romans 3:12 Besides, we do not go to church as a good work to earn God's praise. We go to church as sinners, wanting to hear again from God's minister that Christ died on the cross for our sins. Furthermore, we go to church in order to praise and thank God publicly with other Christians for God's blessings and salvation. I am afraid you have altogether the wrong idea about 'going to church'. I can really assure you now more than ever, upon hearing this excuse of yours, that you need to go to church more than ever that you might learn not to be so self-righteous, and learn to confess your sins and trust Christ.

7. For people who say: "I work so hard during the week, that I am simply too tired when Sunday comes, and I have to have my rest. I simply collapse on weekends.

ANSWER: Who doesn't work hard. Who doesn't need their rest? Come now, do you really think that you are in a class all by yourself? If everyone were excused from God's house on Sunday morning for the reason you want to be excused, His house would only have children and retirees in it, and people like that. The truth is that the Holy Spirit does succeed in moving many hard-working men and women to come to God's house to worship and hear His Word every Sunday. Furthermore, you speak of need for REST? My friend, God's house affords you with the rest you need the most...rest for your spirit in His Holy Gospel. "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That is our Lord's gracious invitation and promise. What are you going to do about it?

8. For people who are bitter over some personal sad experience in the past and who say things like: "I have been treated unfairly; I have been insulted and deeply hurt."

ANSWER: By whom? God? Or was it by frail, sinful human beings, human beings who are bound to make mistakes at times while living in this world? I am sure that you do not want to accuse God of treating you unfairly. Then, it must be that you have a complaint against people in the church. If this is so, then why take it out on God by staying away from GOD'S HOUSE? Let us with the Holy Spirit's help and guidance deal with the situation and find the cause, and come up with a solution. Remember what St. Paul advised: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Ephesians 4:1-4, 31-32.

9. For people who are stubborn and do not bow to God's Word and authority but give excuses like: "I don't want to be told that I have to go to church, or that I have to do the Lord's work."

ANSWER: First, it is indeed too bad that you *have* to be told or reminded that you should do these things. As a born-again child of God, you should already know and want to do what your dear heavenly Father wishes you to do. The very fact that you have to be told seems to

indicate that you are not presently doing these GOOD things. The Psalmist did not wait till he was urged, to go to the Lord's house. His attitude was "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth." He speaks of the 'habitation' of God's house. It was like a second home to him. And so it should be to us. Secondly, consider Jesus' words: "I *must* be about my Father's business." You will note that Jesus was not ashamed nor unwilling, to say that there were things He *had* to do for God. While the flesh in many of us rebels at the thought of having to do anything, whether it is to obey our parents—or go to Sunday School—or come to public worship services—or give regular offerings to the Lord, the Lord's attitude was "I must" and "I will." He willingly obeyed His heavenly Father's will even to dying on the cross for our sins. The *wicked* resentment (and it is wicked, sinful, ungodly) to being told to do something that the dear Lord tells us He is pleased to have us do, is explainable only by the sinful human nature of fallen man it certainly is not God's Holy Spirit talking in the person. For Jesus, the little word "I *must*" was not harsh. It was not a law-word, for His love for the Father compelled Him to do the Father's will. Isn't it to be the same way with us? I must go to church; I must give to the Lord (both to charities and to the work of the kingdom); I must live the Christian life; I must witness Christ BECAUSE I LOVE GOD AND MY SAVIOR SO VERY MUCH. Anyone who says: "I won't do this or that because I am told I HAVE to do it, misses the point of Christianity, and of Christian freedom.

10. For people who complain: "Members of my family don't go to church. I don't like to go alone."

ANSWER: The Bible calls on every person to repent and to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior. OUR own heart repenting of sins and believing on Christ does not depend on what the OTHER person does. This is a matter between God and us. If all around me, my friends, my neighbors, and even my close relatives choose to remain in sin and despise Christ what has that got to do with me? Why should I go to hell with them? Should I refuse to go to heaven alone? Can I refuse to serve my dear Lord Jesus Christ with a converted and believing heart because no one else in the house does? Jonathan Edwards, a very great preacher in early America once said: "I go out to preach with two propositions in mind. First, every person ought to give his life to Christ. Second, whether or not any one else gives Him his life, I will give him mine." And don't forget, that if just one person in the family believes in Christ and worships him both at home and in church, the Word of God is thus present in that home, and others have a chance to be converted. We can sit and wring our hands all we want to about the unbelievers in our home, but we don't do a thing for the cause of Christ by doing so, nor by acting just like them. Only when we practice our religion do we bear the testimony of Christ to them.

11. For people who are unsure or ignorant of what Christian Stewardship means and therefore dare to say something like this: "My money is all mine, and no one has the right to tell me what I should do with it, not even the church."

ANSWER: The wealth of the Christian Church lies in the wealth of the individual Christian. The church as a *whole* can only undertake what the *individual* Christians in it are willing with a cheerful heart and generous spirit to undertake. Jesus poses an interesting question: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: And he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon (money), who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Luke 16:10-13. Many people are *slaves* to mammon...money, to earthly wealth and property. Many people love money and all that money buys. And once the love of money takes over in the heart, it rules like a tyrant. The person begins to measure security, happiness and power and success in terms of dollars and cents. He will work himself to death for money whereas he would not work himself to death for any other reason...or person. He may even cheat and steal in order to have money. He may be selfish and greedy and grasping, shutting his eyes to the needs of others in order to *keep* his money, for himself and his heirs (and more likely his heirs, for you can't take it with you.) Now then, Jesus warns that if a person is a slave to money...if a person loves money and makes it his aim in life to obtain and keep it, or spend it on himself, all the while neglecting to give back to the Lord what is His anyway, then he is not a servant of God, nor is a believing heart in him. The reason is

simple: when you love and serve one master, you naturally hate and will not serve the other master. Obedience to one nullifies obedience to the other. What we think of wealth, earthly things, will determine the use we make of it. If we think of it as belonging to us, and as being very precious, we will spend it on ourselves and be selfish and not share it with others. If we consider that it really belongs to God as the Bible clearly says that it does, (“The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts”), then we will use our wealth for ourselves in a manner that will please God, and we will also use it to benefit others, both in acts of charity and also for the good of the kingdom of God; that is, for keeping God’s house, and for providing for God’s servant, and for preaching the Gospel in the world. The Bible often speaks of PROOFS of faith. Faith in Christ never stands alone. Many of the good works the Christian does are connected directly to his money and his physical property. What we do with God’s money that He lends us shows where our heart is. When the crook Zacchaeus went straight, becoming a Christian, he showed his change of heart by pledging to do something with his money. “Half of my goods I sell, and give the money to the poor. And if I have cheated any man, I will restore to him four-fold.” There was a woman named Dorcas or Tabitha whose wonderful Christian works of charity are especially mentioned in the New Testament. Of her death, one writer has stated: “her friends were poorer by one good person, and a large quantity was subtracted from the supply of love in the world. The death of Dorcas was a great loss to those who were left behind.” [from *They Followed The King*]. After her death the widows eulogized her: “Weeping and showing coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.” And Luke the writer records in the Bible that she was “full of good works and acts of charity.” Dorcas, you see, had learned well the lesson Christ teaches: that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Finally, we will quote St. Paul’s words to the congregation of Philippi regarding their gifts of money: “For even in Thessalonica, ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: But *I desire fruit* that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.”

David Livingstone said: “I will place no value on anything I have or may possess except in its relation to the kingdom of God. Anything I have will be given or kept according as giving or keeping it shall most promote the kingdom of my Savior.” God hasten that day when every Christian can without hypocrisy sing:

“Take my silver and my gold,
 Not a mite would I withhold;
 Take my intellect and use
 Every power as Thou shalt choose
 Take my love, my Lord, I pour
 At Thy feet its treasure-store;
 Take myself, and I will be
 Ever, only, all, for Thee.

12. For the people always busy, busy, busy, who complain: “I am so involved with other things that I do not have time for church. Later on as I grow older I will have more time.”
 ANSWER: Frankly, your attitude was not the attitude of men like St. Paul, who said: “Our conversation (commonwealth) is in heaven.” The word conversation means the state of life for which God in Christ has redeemed us. The whole state to which we belong as believers is in heaven. We do not now have a little bit of heaven on earth, and we do not expect in the future to have a little bit of heaven on earth. Our colony, our fatherland, our state, our commonwealth, our permanent home and manner of existence is in heaven, the abode of God, from whence also we look for Christ to come. In our Christian conversation God implanted in us the new man giving us faith in Christ, and with it the hope and promise of everlasting life in heaven. Therefore there is a state, a common wealth that has a *higher claim* on me, and I on it than on this earthly life. All my life I live and work and pay my taxes here, but my heart as a Christian is in heaven. John Eliot, apostle to the Indians in the 17th century said: “If thou art a believer, thou art no stranger to heaven while thou livest; and when thou diest heaven will be no strange place to thee; no, thou hast been there a thousand times before.”

“A pilgrim and a stranger, I journey here below;

Far distant is my country, The home to which I go.
Here I must toil and travail, Oft weary and opprest;
But there my God shall lead me To everlasting rest.

So I must hasten forward,—Thank God, the end will come!
This land of passing shadows Is not my destined home.
The everlasting city, Jerusalem above,
This evermore abideth, The home of light and love.

There still my thoughts are dwelling, 'Tis there I long to be;
Come, Lord, and call Thy servant to blessedness with Thee.
Come, bid my toils be ended, Let all my wand'rings cease;
Call from the wayside lodging To Thy sweet home of peace." (L.H. #586)

13. THE CHURCH DEMANDS TOO MUCH OF ME. IT DEMANDS TOO STRICT A LIFE FROM ME. I REALLY AM NOT READY TO SETTLE DOWN AND BE THE KIND OF CHRISTIAN THAT'S ASKED OF ME.

ANSWER: If that really is your attitude, then the real question is: Are you a child of light or are you yet a child of darkness. You cannot be both. Either you are spiritually awake and alive with the love of Jesus Christ flooding your heart and soul, or you are spiritually sleeping and dead. The evidence will be seen in your life. Listen to what Jesus said about light and darkness:

John 3:17-21 "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd (discovered). But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

If you do not want to cast away a life of sin, and perform a life that is filled with good, then your heart is filled with darkness. Satan and your flesh still are in command. Worse yet, you are lost and damned if you do not turn from your sins to Christ.

Proverbs 28:13 "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Acts 3:19 "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

There is an inseparable connection between believing in Christ and doing the works of Christ. Love for Jesus Who gave Himself for our sins, will not allow us to want to continue in our old life of sins. It should be a joy and thrill to our heart, to live our lives for Christ and keep God's commandments.

John 14:15 "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

John 15:5 "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new."

Matthew 7:17 "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

Psalms 119:4-7,10-11 "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.... With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

The late Dr. Donald Barnhouse said it well: "God expects the Christian to live a Christian life. He expects Christians to 'live Christ'. A being who is a child of God should live as a child of God. If we are to be heaven's royalty, we should learn to live regally. The Christian has become a son of God and, in that capacity has been raised to the nobility of heaven. A king should live like a king." What an insult to our King, if we who have been washed by His own blood of all our sins, wish to continue longer in sin. After all, He saved us that we might serve Him.

14. I DON'T SEEM TO GET ANYTHING OUT OF THE SERMON.

ANSWER: If the preacher has to prepare to preach (and he certainly does), the hearer must also prepare to hear. One should get proper sleep on Saturday night and get mind and heart ready for God's message. And one must come to church with humility...as an empty vessel ready to be filled up. Do you prepare to come to church? Do you come confessing your own sins and shortcomings while also praying God to help and direct the preacher in his work, and bless his message upon your heart? By the way, WHEN was the last time you prayed for your pastor? Do you ever have your "off" days when nothing seems to go right? Your pastor has them too. He is only human. If on a certain Sunday his sermon does not seem to be full of life and imagination...if it does not seem to be as interesting and informative as you think it should be, put yourself in his place. He may have had a very trying and busy week. Or, he may have been ill. Be charitable and understanding of your pastor, as you would have him be towards yourself. Learn to pray for your pastor, asking the Lord to grant him both ability and strength, health, dedication and wisdom for his work.

ANSWER: Perhaps you should ask yourself: "What is it that I expect to get out of the sermon? Do I come as a sinner, expecting to hear from my pastor's lips God's pronouncement against sin? Do I come as a believer thirsting after the precious water of life, the message that Jesus Christ died for my sins on the cross? Do I come expecting my pastor to preach a Biblical-based message, a cross-centered message (as he no doubt preaches with firm regularity). Some have the mistaken notion that if their pastor does not preach on social topics (the so-called 'social gospel') then he is not being relevant for our times. Your pastor has been pledged to preach Christ, to show sinners the way to heaven. And he will show you how to live for Christ, how to improve your life as a Christian. Expect your pastor to work within his own field. His field of labor is the gospel.

ANSWER: Consider who you are: a sinner. Look back upon your life of the past week. If you are honest you will have to say with all of us: "I have sinned against the Lord." God has the perfect cure for sin. Christ. It is Christ your pastor preaches. Go then to God's house confessing your sins, thirsting for the water of life, Christ, and the forgiveness He gives. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew your heart, to dwell in you richly with His grace. You will get more out of the sermon. God will help you to.

Psalms 119:1-30 "The entrance of Thy Words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple (the unpretentious)."

James 1:21 "Wherefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls." (RSV)

1 Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby."

15. WHAT IS THE USE OF COMING TO CHURCH? I CAN'T REMEMBER THE SERMON ANYWAY?

ANSWER: God's word "does not return unto Him void." It accomplishes more in your heart than you may think it does. The Holy Spirit cleanses our heart and builds up our faith by the Word of God we hear, whether we seem to remember much of the sermon or not. On the other hand, if we pay close attention to our pastor as he preaches, God's Word will graft itself more to our heart than we may realize. While we may not remember many of the pastor's exact words and expressions, nevertheless the truths which he has expressed have impressed themselves on our minds, and have been filed away, so to speak. When the occasion arises, we will be able to call upon the knowledge we have acquired from the sermons we have heard. Indeed, we might very well be surprised when we see how much we have retained. Above all, always remember that the Holy Spirit's blessings rest upon the faithful Christian, who out of a sincere heart earnestly listens to God's Word. The twelve apostles of our Lord, while He was with them, had a hard time remembering and understanding those things that Christ taught them. After Jesus ascended to heaven He sent the Holy Spirit upon them. He then helped them to remember, and to understand. What they couldn't do under their own power, God helped them to do with His grace through the Spirit. When was the last time you prayed God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to send the Holy Spirit with His rich blessings into your heart? See what Jesus said:...

Luke 11:9, 13 "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you...If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts

unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

1 Thessalonians 2:13 "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God, *which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*"

James 1:21 "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness *the engrafted Word*, which is able to save your souls."

16. I AM VERY MUCH OCCUPIED WITH OTHER MATTERS RIGHT NOW, SO I DON'T HAVE TIME TO ATTEND CHURCH, OR TO DO WORK FOR THE CHURCH. I HAVE TOO MANY OTHER INTERESTS.

ANSWER: The writer to the Hebrews (12:1) urges: "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Keeping the Christian faith till the end of our life is described in Scripture as running in a contest. It takes our "all" to run it successfully and to come out the winner. When we acquire faith in the true God we must get rid of certain hindrances to faith. The writer puts it this way: "Lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us." A runner about to enter a race puts off every bit of weight he can and runs in the lightest-weight clothing possible. Anything that would slow him down and consume his energy, he will put off, if he possibly can. So we must do if we are to win in the contest of faith. We must get rid of everything that would slow down or stop our faith. Let us look at a few of these "weights":

- A. "The love of money is the root of all evil," Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy, and pointed out that "while some coveted after, *they have erred from the faith.*" A Christian cannot divide his love between God and material things. He must give God his all, and neither love nor trust in riches. One way he can show that he does not love money nor trust in what money buys is by being generous with it...giving generously to others. And number one on the list should always be the supporting of the Lord's work of preaching the Gospel. "God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)
- B. Another weight is 'laziness', just plain, ordinary spiritual laziness. We know that our faith in Christ is maintained, inspired, strengthened only through the Bible, the Word of God, and especially through the *preached* Word. Many people lose their faith because they are too lazy to get up in the morning and go to God's House. Or too lazy at night to read their Bibles, and too lazy to go to their room and pray to God for help and guidance. There is no excuse for such laziness. Such lazy people are like the three apostles who couldn't stay awake the one hour in Gethsemane in order to watch and pray with Jesus. And remember? They all ran scared when the enemy came.
- C. A very heavy weight is 'pre-occupation' which means being so engrossed, so tied up with earthly matters that a person doesn't have time for spiritual matters. No time or zeal to pray, to hear the word of God, to read the Bible, to meditate upon God. No time to work for God, to tell others the Gospel. People become so wrapped up in themselves that the name of God no longer means anything to them. People become so wrapped up having a good time here on earth that they forget that "'tis a short life, 'twill soon be past," and that "only what's done for Christ will last." And so they slowly drop their faith because heaven and the 'hereafter' becomes unreal and remote to them. These are the people who can sit out in a cold, wet duck blind for a whole day, and yet stay away from church if it looks like rain. These are the people who can sit hour after hour in front of Television, and yet can't find 5 minutes a day to pray for forgiveness of sins or find 15 minutes a day to read a couple chapters from their Bibles. Many people are so weighted down by membership in this club, or that organization—or—this school activity or that civic project, that there is no time and ambition left for God. Where then is the true sense of values?

We are to get rid of every sin "THAT DOTHSO EASILY BESET US." Do we have a pet sin that we are always excusing for one reason or the other? Sin destroys faith, you know. If sin takes over in our body then it is our master, and Jesus, said, "NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS." (Matthew 6:24) The apostle John wrote: "HE THAT COMMITTETH SIN IS OF THE DEVIL." (1 John 3:8) On the other hand the Bible says: "EVERY MAN THAT HATH THIS HOPE IN HIM PURIFIETH HIMSELF, EVEN AS HE IS PURE." (1

John 3:3) So “RECKON YE ALSO YOURSELVES TO BE DEAD INDEED UNTO SIN, BUT ALIVE UNTO GOD THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD.” Our hope, our destiny as believers, is so very different from that of the unbelievers, the children of this world. The difference should show up in our every day life, in our attitude about sin, in our aims, our ideals, our behavior, our desires...yes, and IN OUR PRIORITIES too!

17. CHURCH JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO ME TO BE THAT IMPORTANT. I FEEL THAT I CAN COME WHEN I WANT TO COME, AND NOBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO TELL ME THAT I HAVE TO GO TO CURCH, OR THAT I HAVE TO GIVE TO THE CHURCH. WHEN I FEEL LIKE IT I'LL BE THERE. THE CHURCH WILL HAVE TO TAKE ME AS I AM. I REFUSE TO COMMIT MYSELF AND TELL YOU THAT I WILL COME EVERY SUNDAY.

ANSWER: It's a good thing that God doesn't treat you in the way you treat Him! It is good for you that God is not as non-committal toward you as you are toward Him! Where would you be if God ruled in your life with such cold indifference? How would you feel if God said regarding your prayers: "I'm sorry, but I can't promise you an answer?" We must be sincere about our Christianity. This includes being also sincere about our fellowship with the congregation.

If you will look through the Bible you will see that God has often called for decision, for getting, down to the business of believing in Him and serving Him, and confessing Him to others. Do you remember what Elijah told the children of Israel when they wanted to be Christians and Baal worshippers at the same time? He asked them:

“Why halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him! If Baal be God, follow him.” (1 Kings 18:21)

Do you remember that Israel made a golden calf and worshiped it? Moses was very angry when he saw it and stood in the gate of the camp, and said,

“Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me.” He called for a clear-cut decision. Jesus called for decision when he said: “Who is not for me is against me.” (Matthew 12:30) Again: “No man can serve two masters.” (Matthew 6:24) “Ye cannot serve God and mammon (money)”. And again, “Whosoever confesseth me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. And whosoever denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven,” (Matthew 10:32) St. Paul called for getting down to the business of learning God's Word when he said: “That ye be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...but speaking the truth in love...” (Ephesians 4:14) The Lord called for a decision from the Church of Laodicia, saying: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold, or hot, so then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” (Rev. 3:16)

Is it too much then to ask you to come to a decision regarding your church membership? Do you consider your church membership a burden...or, do you consider it a privilege and an honor? Do you love the preaching of the Word, or do you despise it? Do you desire the fellowship of the communion of saints, or, do you despise it. Do you love the Word of God or do you not love the Word of God? Is Jesus Christ first in your life, or, is He not first in your life? Do you consider the preaching of the Gospel out in the world to save men's souls your responsibility too, or do you not so regard it? Are you sure of your Christianity or are you in doubt of it? Do you really believe in Christ and desire to worship and serve Him, or do you not? Do you really mean what you said when you made your confirmation vows to remain true to the Lord and to His Word and the use of the means of grace always? Do you really desire to be a member of this congregation?

18. I FEEL THAT I DON'T NEED TO COME TO CHURCH AND BE WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS IN ORDER TO BE A CHRISTIAN. I CAN WORSHIP IN MY OWN HOME AND BE CLOSE TO GOD.

ANSWER: If you are a Christian, God would expect you to worship Him in your own home, and, to be close to Him always. In fact worshiping God at home, reading your Bible faithfully, drawing close to God in prayer and meditation will lead you to seek the fellowship of the saints. Christianity is not something you can keep to yourself if you have it. It is something you will naturally want to express to others and share with others. When you read your Bible, one thing ought to impress itself very much on your mind: the fact

that God's people in Bible times gathered together for public worship. It is an undeniable fact. Jesus Himself set the example for us when He was on earth. While on the one hand He sometimes sought solitude, going up into the hills and mountains alone to pray and commune with His heavenly Father, yet the Gospels often record instances of Jesus being in the Temple and in the local synagogue. Holy gatherings of God's people for worship have been commanded and expected by God. To feel differently concerning this matter, is thus to place yourself in a very dangerous way. Perhaps you should ask yourself whether or not you are listening to your sinful flesh and the devil, rather than to the Spirit of God.

ANSWER: You seem to want to "go it alone," Consider the following article which appeared in "You—Your Congregation—Your Synod" (1952, page 19):

Could you adequately provide for your own soul's welfare, the spiritual welfare of your loved ones, your brethren in the faith, your own community, and the world—ALONE?

You know you couldn't. Others have tried it, only to discover that a life willfully separated from Christ and His people is a life without Christ and without hope. Willfully withdrawing from God's people and "The assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is" invites fearful consequences for the soul. Whoever runs counter to the will and purposes of God is headed for destruction.

Christian congregations are of divine origin. The Holy Spirit plants congregations through the Word and sacraments. He causes them to grow and prosper. Christian congregations have a God-given charter to

- establish the office of the ministry
- preach and teach the Gospel
- properly administer the Sacraments
- exercise brotherly admonition
- promote mission work at home and abroad
- cultivate Christian fellowship and virtues
- practice Christian charity

It is the Lord's will that Christians do all this for one another and with one another. And how may this be accomplished but through membership in a Christian congregation? You need your congregation.

ANSWER: Consider also this quote from "That I May Be His Own," (R.C. Rein, copyright, 1954, Concordia Publishing House):

"Since I am a Christian steward, it is my duty to attend church services regularly. The habit of going to church every Sunday, unless prevented by necessity, is one that should be formed in early youth. The church is God's dwelling place in a special sense. There, through the preaching and teaching of His Word, God comes to me and blesses me. The fact that others stay away from church is no excuse for me to do likewise. God holds me personally accountable for my life. As a good Christian steward I attend church regularly because I know that public worship pleases God, because I love the house of God, because *I enjoy being in the company of God's people*, and because I am mindful of the needed blessings that come to me through such practice.

After I become a communicant member of the church, it is my privilege to partake of the Lord's Supper. This holy Sacrament was instituted by Christ for the benefit of His disciples. It is a means of grace to strengthen the Christian's faith in the forgiveness of his sins. It also serves as a memorial to remind Christians of Christ's suffering and death for their salvation. The remembrance should prompt them to try ever harder to live a godly life.

God has entrusted to me and to my fellow Christians, as stewards of His gifts, the keeping of the precious treasures of His Word and the Holy Sacraments. There are many powerful enemies who would rob us of these priceless treasures. The devil, with the help of false prophets, tries to pervert the truth of God's Word and attempts to sow the seed of false doctrine. It is, therefore, my duty and the duty of every Christian to lend his help in preserving purity of doctrine and unity of faith in the congregation. Many faithful Christians have fought and bled and died in the past to preserve this

heritage for us. As a faithful steward I must do my part to preserve it for the generations that will follow me.

As a member of a Christian congregation I enjoy the fellowship of many other Christians who worship with me in the house of God. We strive together to do the Lord's work. We are united by the blessed tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.

Before our Father's throne We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims, are one, Our comforts and our cares
We share our mutual woes, Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear.

As a member of a Christian congregation I cherish the friendship and the fellowship that are mine in the company of God's people. I look forward each week to my associations with my fellow Christians. I share their joys and sorrows, and gladly offer them my help when they are in need."

Devotion Illustrated

(An editorial by Rev. Im. Frey, Northwestern Lutheran, Feb. 25, 1973)

"Many of us recall the spectacle, televised across the country a few years back, in which thousands of fans in sub-zero temperature huddled in a stadium in Green Bay, Wisconsin, to watch two football teams in combat on the frozen field below. These hardy fans constituted a study in devotion in the face of hardship, and their attendance distinguished sharply between hangers-on and real devotees.

"Now comes Super Sunday, described by Los Angeles Times columnist Jack Smith as 'the nation's most moving festival...now bigger than Easter'. Observing that 75 million Americans—one-third of the nation—watched it on TV, he opined that those who have said that football is replacing Christianity in America may be right. 'The National Football League,' he wrote, 'has brought more sheep into its fold in four years than Christianity in its first 1,000.'

"It was a highly amusing article, and very perceptive as well. It effectually portrayed the wholehearted dedication and single-minded devotion of football fans, who willingly endure hardship and freely sacrifice time and money to the object of their devotion.

"Pastors would like to see the same dedication and devotion among their members as some of them exhibit in their role as football fans. This is especially true on the not infrequent occasions when they look across the sparsely occupied pews of their comfortable churches and recall the sad response of the guests invited to the Great Supper: 'They all with one consent began to make excuse.'

"The reason for the success of Super Sunday is obvious: Football *has captured the hearts of its followers*. Jesus said it well for all time: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

"Football is an excellent diversion, but a poor religion. It does nevertheless illustrate, especially on football's high festival, Super Sunday, the devotion which follows when the heart is captured—something which is not always as clearly evident among church members as it is among football fans."

The following articles were devotions appearing in June-August, 1970 MEDITATIONS under the heading "Christ Has Made Me A Member of A Christian Congregation". Permission for reprinting the devotions has been requested from Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

My Congregation Worships and Praises God

Psalm 27:4 "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, to enquire in His Temple."

Hebrews 10:24,25 "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, Nor forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

“A Christian cannot go his own way. He cannot, if he is sincere, remain unconcerned whether or not there is a congregation in his locality or whether or not the congregation carries on the Lord’s work. His Christian calling dictates this.

“I, as a Christian, know that I did not choose the Lord; the Lord chose me. I did not redeem myself; the Lord shed His blood for me. I did not establish the Church; this is the Lord’s doing. I did not join the Church; the Lord added me to it. I really don’t have the say; Jesus Christ is Lord.

“Through the divine call the Lord has established the public ministry in our midst. Together with our fellow believers, we gather weekly (and sometimes oftener) to worship God in the faith which He has given us. At Jesus’ feet, our souls are nourished with the One Thing Needful for our salvation. God’s Word and Sacraments preserve us in the faith. We worship and praise the Lord as a fruit of faith. Thus, the desire to ‘enquire in His Temple’ is a desire that is born of God.

“But there is another reason for heeding the admonition of our text. We should conduct ourselves toward our fellow Christians in such a manner as to encourage one another to hold fast to the faith and hope which God has given us. We should meet for the express purpose of rallying around the Word of God in conscious effort to exhort one another by word and example. Our faith shows its fruitfulness as we incite one another to love and good works, aware that our Lord may soon come in judgment, and rejoicing in the glory which He will then share with the faithful.

“On the other hand, to neglect joint worship indicates a fruitless faith. Such neglect is more than carelessness. It is the beginning of falling from faith—deserting the Lord. *We Christians should know better.* The more we see the evil so prevalent in the last days of the world’s existence, days in which there shall be a falling away as Christ foretold, the more should we be spurred on by the hope of future glory to seek the encouragement found in joint worship in the Christian congregation.

God Has Given Us A Pastor (Meditations June-Aug. 1970)

Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.”

Colossians 1:7,8 “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ, Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.”

“The congregation at Coloassae was blessed with a pastor in the person of Epaphras. From his teachings, the Colossian Christians had learned the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ; and through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit had wrought in them saving faith, love of the brethren, and the hope of heaven.

“Epaphras had kept in touch with the Apostle Paul and Timothy in Rome; and now in his letter, Paul does not hesitate to call him a dear ‘fellow slave’ of Christ, as the word for ‘fellow servant’ is better translated. These men had no will of their own; but in all of their work they were subject to the will of their Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

“We have the right to expect that our pastor will also ‘keep in touch’ with the Apostle, for the Church is ‘built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:20). To teach the doctrine of the Apostles as contained in their Epistles, therefore, is part of the pastor’s calling. It is well to note this, lest we go astray following modern notions as to what the church should do. We do not lose sight of our God-given foundation and function as a church when we follow the example of the Christians of apostolic times and continue ‘steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship (Acts 2:42)

“We expect our pastors to pattern their lives after that of the elders of the congregation at Ephesus. They too, have been made ‘overseers’ of the flock by God the Holy Ghost. As such, they are to take heed that their preaching is according to the Holy Scriptures and that their conduct is godly, feeding their flock on the pastures of God’s Word and sacraments, and always regarding their parishioners as souls whom Christ has purchased with His blood.

“Though the Colossians did not know Paul and Timothy personally, they loved these servants of God for the saving message they proclaimed. In the same we respect our pastors and love them, not for their personal appearance or attractive preaching style, but for their faithfulness to God’s Word.”

In the Church Christ Nourishes Us With His Word (Meditations June-Aug. 1970)

Jeremiah 15:16 “Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Thy name, O Lord, God of hosts.”

1 Peter 2:2,3 “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

“There is a lot of hunger in the world today. Man’s worst hunger, however, is not physical but spiritual. How vainly many try to satisfy the longing of their hearts! Some try to do it with human philosophies or superstitions. But these only lead to disillusionment or even despair. Others look for happiness in owning things or piling up wealth. But if this could really satisfy, rich people would be the happiest on earth. Many follow after pleasure. But that is a fleeting thing. Constantly man seeks new forms of amusement, but real contentment is never found.

“Oh, thank God that He has provided us with the perfect food to satisfy our spiritual hunger! It is the Word of God.

“Perhaps you have never thought of God’s Word as food. Yet it is pictured that way a number of times in Scripture. Peter compares it to milk. He urges us to desire the pure milk of the Word, just as a newborn infant desires his mother’s milk. No doubt all of us have seen how eagerly an infant drinks milk. Milk satisfies his hunger. Without it he could not live. With it he grows strong and stays healthy.

“Having been reborn through Holy Baptism, we need the pure milk of the Word to grow and remain healthy spiritually. Without it we would soon lose our faith. As children of God we enjoy the taste of God’s Word, just as a hungry man enjoys a hearty meal. Of course, God’s Word contains both Law and Gospel. When the Law is properly applied to us, it does not taste good. It shows us our sin and guilt before God. In the Gospel we taste how gracious and good God is. In the Gospel He offers us complete pardon for all our sins through Jesus Christ. Could anything ever taste better than that marvelous news?

“There may be adequate substitutes for much of the food we eat, but there is none for God’s Word, the food for our souls. Let us therefore accept no substitutes, but feed upon the Word regularly by diligently hearing, reading, and studying it.”

In *The Church Christ Strengthens Us With His Holy Supper* (Meditations June-Aug. 1970) *Acts 2:42* “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.”

1 Corinthians 10:16 “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

“How can I be certain that my sins are really forgiven and that I shall have eternal life? Where shall we turn for such assurance? It is foolish to look to our own feelings, for there are times when we feel like anything but Christians. It is useless to turn to our own works, for we know they have often been evil. It is worthless to sit somewhere and wait for God to send an angel to assure us, since He has not promised to do that. There is only one reliable place to which to turn for assurance and strength, the Means of Grace, the Gospel.

“In this meditation we especially direct our attention to the Sacrament of the Altar. In it the Lord gives us double assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we shall have eternal life.

St. Paul in our text stresses that we do not receive only bread and wine in the Sacrament. The consecrated and distributed bread and wine when eaten and drunk are the vehicles through which Christ gives us His true body and blood given and shed to pay our debt of sin and guilt.

“But how does this make us doubly sure? An imperfect illustration will help us to understand. Picture yourself as a debtor. You have no money to pay the debt and are facing disgrace and punishment for nonpayment. You, however, have a good friend who volunteers to pay the debt for you. If he is trustworthy, you believe him and rejoice. But how can that friend make you doubly sure that your debt is as good as paid? He can do that by telling you that he will pay your debt and then putting the payment in your hand. In His Supper Christ tells us He has paid our debt of sin and at the same time gives each communicant the very thing used to pay that debt, His body and His blood.

“The Lord assures you personally in His Supper that you are included in His work of Redemption. How mightily this cancels every doubt! What a source of comfort in time of trial! What a tower of strength for our faith! That is why the members of Christ’s Church in its infancy were drawn to this Sacrament and appreciated it as they did. What about us? May God

move us to receive the Lord's Supper frequently and to appreciate the great blessings offered in it!

Membership in a Christian Congregation is a Blessing of God

1 Corinthians 1:1-6 "Paul, called to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ, That in every thing ye are enriched by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge— Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you."

Philippians 1:27 "Only let Your conversation (manner of life) be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

"What a blessing of God that in His wisdom and goodness He has placed us in families! How lonely and difficult life would be if we had no family at all. Beside our immediate family—the Christian congregation.

"What blessing does God offer us through such membership? St. Paul says to the Corinthians that it is the grace of God in Christ Jesus. God tells us that through the merits of Christ our sins are blotted out and the door to heaven has been opened for us. He invites us and enables us to believe this and thus make this blessing our very own. He also confirms us, that is, makes us strong and certain in the truth of salvation through faith in Christ. This blessing the Lord offers and gives us through the preaching of the Gospel in our congregation.

"If a congregation is to retain this blessing of the Gospel, the pure preaching of the Word must be supported and defended by each member. For this reason Paul urged the Philippians, who were already doing this, to keep on striving for the faith of the Gospel.

"How does this work out practically? Members in a congregation help to correct one another. Sometimes we become discouraged and begin to think it might be easier to compromise the truth of the Word just a little. Here our fellow members serve to encourage us with the Word, and we them in turn. When we fall into a particularly troublesome sin, our brethren in Christ are there to admonish us and bring us back to the fold. United with our fellow members we also support the preaching of the Word in our midst and share it with others. What a blessing to be a member of such a grouping!

Letters (A)
A Pastoral Letter...From Heart To Heart to all Members of the Congregation

Date _____

Dear Friends:

Enclosed with this letter you will find some sheets of self-examination questions, I hope that each one of you will go through them one by one and give each serious thought. No doubt all of us will find things to be repented of. When we from our hearts confess and acknowledge our sins to our God, He forgives us for Jesus' sake.

This letter, though being sent out to everyone in the congregation is addressed in a particular way to our delinquents...people whom we no longer see in church, and whom we miss at the Lord's Table...people who no longer contribute as good stewards to the Lord's kingdom work. It is not good to be a delinquent...to use excuses to stay away from God's house. It is even worse to take the attitude: "I don't have to go to church...I don't want to go to church." Such an attitude is sin. It shows a hardness of heart and a coldness toward the Word of God. When someone reaches this point in his or her life, that person should know that faith has either left altogether, or is certainly close to non-existence. To despise the fellowship of saints and the preaching of God's Word and the Sacrament of the Altar is to carry on a rebellion against God. Faith is kept in our heart by the Word of God and our use of the Sacrament. And faith is going to show itself in proper works, some of which include assembling ourselves together with others Christians for worship of God and strengthening of faith, both in ourselves and in each other.

Delinquents should do some very serious soul-searching Are the excuses you are using for staying away from God's House and the preaching of the word just that...excuses? What if everyone used excuses? No one would be in God's House on a Sunday morning.

Both your Board of Elders and myself realize that some of our families live a distance from church. But we do not consider distance in most cases justifiable reason for staying away. Consider that some of our families commute a considerable distance each day to work. Consider that many of us are willing to drive long distances to go hiking, camping, fishing and what have you. Consider that most of us travel considerable distances to visit friends or do shopping. Consider how far we might travel on a Sunday afternoon drive. No, distance is not usually an important consideration if we really want to go to church badly enough.

Both the Board of Elders and myself are of the opinion that we should up-date our membership list. We cannot see good or Scriptural reasons for maintaining names of people on our membership rolls, who do not attend church and do not share the responsibilities of church membership. Church membership is after all, not simply having one's name on the books. Rather it is an active, living thing. It is a precious privilege which carries with it serious responsibilities. The Elders are even now in the process of visiting the delinquents. If they receive no positive response and commitment...no promise to become active church members (or, if promises made remain unfulfilled) the Elders and myself will have no choice in the matter than to recommend to the Voters' Assembly that such persons have terminated their fellowship with us. We certainly do not want to have to do this in any case. But it is something we will do if occasion calls for it. We pray that love for the Savior Jesus Christ will stir every heart to desire the regular hearing of God's Word together with the congregation.

In some cases, members of the congregation may want to remove their membership and join a Lutheran Church that is near them. In some cases the Lutheran Church near them might be one outside our fellowship: e.g. Missouri Synod, American Lutheran Church, or Lutheran Church in America. We cannot prohibit anyone from joining the church of his or her choice. Issues of correct doctrine and practice mean more to one Christian than to another. Some Lutherans will go to great lengths, at considerable personal cost to be active in a truly confessional Lutheran Church such as ours. Others simply do not care. With them, it is a matter of convenience rather than of conscience. As you well know, I cannot personally go along with the views of "liberal" Lutheranism. Furthermore, it troubles me to see others who can. Especially Lutherans who have known conservative doctrine and practice. How is it possible for those instructed in the truth to become members in churches which allow their pastors and professors and synodical officials to

make public attacks on Holy Scripture? Or join congregations which allow lodge membership? Or join synodical bodies which are involved in the modern ecumenical movement, even belonging to such unionistic organizations as the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, or the Lutheran World Federation, and others.

If we exercise caution in choosing a doctor to care for our physical bodies, how much more carefully we ought to choose physicians for our souls. We would hope that, our members living off a distance, would elect to remain in fellowship with this Synod.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if all the communicants listed on our rolls would come to worship here regularly? Oh what a thrill it would be to see them! Wouldn't it be wonderful if all communicants would regularly, generously, from hearts filled with love for the Savior, support the Christian ministry here in their midst, and also our synodical work? I feel certain that if *all* our members came regularly to God's House, and if everyone practiced regular, heart-felt Christ-inspired stewardship we would be able to do all those things the Lord has called us to do. And it is only by God's grace working in our heart through Word and Sacrament, that will enable us to be the Christians and church members God expects us to be.

By no means can we as a congregation endure chronic delinquency on the part of any of our members. To do so is to fly in the face of God's Word which says things like, these: "LET US NOT FORSAKE THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER (for worship) AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS." "LORD, I HAVE LOVED THE HABITATION OF THY HOUSE AND THE, PLACE WHERE THINE HONOR DWELLETH." "HE THAT IS OF GOD HEARETH GOD'S WORD." "ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, LET EVERYONE OF YOU LAY BY HIM IN STORE AS GOD HATH PROSPERED HIM."

I pray that the Holy Spirit will move every heart so that every baptized and communicant member will come to this house of worship regularly, and not look for excuses to stay away. That He will move all hearts to give a rightful share of our earthly treasure. I pray too that the Lord would move all of us to be generous with the time we give to doing the Lord's work. Most of all, I pray that the Lord would increase and strengthen our faith and our love for Him Who loved us so much He gave His life into death for our sins.

O dear people, consider these words. Take time off from an all-too-worldly-busy life, to fill your souls with God's Word. Bring your children to God's House. Bring others too. Rethink and repray your offerings. Repent of, and confess to God all past sins of neglecting His Word and shirking your duties. God in Christ forgives all sins.

My door is always open to counsel you in any of these matters.

In the Savior's name,

_____ Pastor

Letters (B)
A Letter of Self-Commitment to Delinquents

Dear (name),

 Lutheran Church in its constitution based on God's Word, obligates all its members to faithfulness. Where this faithfulness is no longer evident in a member, the congregation is duty-bound to try and determine the reason for this as well as the person's intentions. Our congregation has taken note that you have been inactive for some time.

You will recall that our constitution states that only such persons can become and remain members, or enjoy the rights and privileges of membership as:

- regularly attend the divine services of the church
- frequently partake of the Lord's Supper with the congregation if possible, or privately, if their attendance at church is not possible
- permit themselves to be fraternally admonished and corrected, according to God's Word, if they have erred, in keeping with Matthew 18:15-18
- are willing to provide their children with the best Christian training, if possible, through the medium of the Christian Day School, otherwise through the medium of catechetical instruction under the supervision of the pastor
- are willing to contribute to the congregational treasury, according to his or her ability, and a conscience bound by the Word of God, toward all enterprises which the congregation may assume as a Christian responsibility, either for the maintenance of the congregation at home or the Kingdom of God abroad, such as missions, educational institutions and charities. Such contributions shall be the self-evident fruits of faith; 1 Cor. 16:2; 1 Cor. 9:14; 2 Cor. 9:7; Gal. 6:2,6-10.

The reasons why you have been delinquent in the fulfillment of some or all of these requirements for church membership may be many. Perhaps you have taken up membership in another Lutheran Church without informing us. Perhaps you have joined a church of another denomination. Perhaps there is a particular spiritual problem that is troubling you. Perhaps the basic reason is that you have grown weak in your love for the Lord Jesus Christ, Who loved you so much that He gave His life for your sins. Jesus said, "If a man love me, He will keep my words." Jo. 14.

Whatever the reasons may be, we feel you owe us the courtesy to tell us what they are, and also to inform us of your intentions.

If your faith in Christ and love for His Word has been weak, but you sincerely intend to be strengthened by faithfully hearing God's Word in the future, please tell us.

The congregation at its last meeting requested the Board of Elders to draft this letter of self-commitment and send it to those who have not been faithful in fulfilling the requirement for membership in congregation.

It may be your intention to be a faithful member of this congregation...or...it may be your intention to terminate your membership. In either case, we will expect a reply from you before 19 so that the matter may be taken care of at the meeting of the congregation to be held on 19 . If we do not hear from you by the above date we will take for granted that your unconcern shows that you wish your name removed from the membership roll. Please take this letter in the spirit in which it is sent in genuine love and concern for souls entrusted to our spiritual care.

Yours in Christ Jesus,
The Board of Elders,

 Chairman Pastor

Letters (C)

A Letter of Self-Reckoning: Please read carefully and prayerfully

To: All members of _____ Lutheran Church

Dear Member of _____,

The purpose of this letter, which is being sent out to all communicant members of the congregation, is to encourage regular attendance at Church Services and Sunday School, and to encourage a greater sense of responsibility toward supporting the Lord's work with our gifts.

When we, pastor and Board of Elders, examine the communicant list of _____ congregation, we note that there are persons whose names appear, but who do not attend church with any degree of regularity, and who do not support with regular contributions the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you find that you are one of these persons, we hope that you especially will take this letter to heart.

Attending public worship in God's House is a PRECIOUS PRIVILEGE, one that none of us should regard lightly. In the worship service, we have the privilege as well as the duty to praise the Triune God Whose blessings are renewed to us each day of our lives. All of us depend upon our Lord. All of us like to receive and put to use God's good things He so bountifully bestows. Indeed, we would not want to live one single day without God's wonderful hand guiding and protecting us and extending to us His good things!

Yet, not all of us seem to appreciate what God continually does for us. Some of us are content to carry on week after week without joining with other Christians of the congregation in worshiping and praising God.

Consider this, that the Bible in many places tells us that God's people assemble *regularly* at God's house for worship, prayer, and the preaching of God's Word.

In the 26th Psalm we have such a testimony: "LORD, I HAVE LOVED THE HABITATION OF THY HOUSE, AND THE PLACE WHERE THINE HONOR DWELLETH." Do *you* love to gather with others of God's people at God's house?

In Colossians, chapter 3., St. Paul writes: "LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY...TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD." Each Sunday the Word of Christ is preached to _____ Congregation. Are you there to hear God's Word? Let each ask himself: "Does Christ's Word dwell in *me* richly? Do I hunger for God's Word? Or, do I shun it?"

It is surely God's will that we join a Christian congregation if we are Christians. God wants to give us a spiritual leader, a pastor to watch for our souls. One who will preach the Law and the Gospel of God to us and our children. But unless we come regularly to church our pastor or shepherd cannot feed our souls with God's precious Word.

Hear what St. Paul told the pastors of the Church at Ephesus: "TAKE HEED THEREFORE UNTO YOURSELVES, AND TO ALL THE FLOCK, OVER THE WHICH THE HOLY GHOST HATH MADE YOU *OVERSEERS*, TO FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH HE HATH PURCHASED WITH HIS OWN BLOOD." Acts 20:28.

The members of a Christian congregation have the duty and privilege of hearing their pastor speak God's Word and of obeying that Word:

"OBEY THEM (the pastors) THAT HAVE THE RULE OVER YOU, AND SUBMIT YOURSELVES: FOR THEY WATCH FOR YOUR SOULS AS THEY THAT MUST GIVE ACCOUNT: THAT THEY MAY DO IT WITH JOY AND NOT WITH GRIEF, FOR THAT IS UNPROFITABLE FOR YOU." Hebrews 13:17.

Regular attendance at worship services builds up our faith. It also stimulates us to regular and generous Christian giving. It gives us the opportunity to give to the greatest work on earth, that of preaching the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should all bear in mind that God will call us to account on the last day for our *stewardship*. Will we hear the voice of our Savior say to us,

“Well done thou good and faithful steward”? Has our Christian giving proved the sincerity of our love for Christ? See 1 Corinthians 8:8.

Dear friends, in order to strengthen our congregation, we urge all of you to ask yourselves the following questions. We urge that you take time out and thoughtfully, prayerfully, sincerely, ask yourselves the following questions, and so examine your own heart:

- Do I want to hear God’s Word? Is my heart open to God’s Word?
- Do I desire to follow God’s Word, to live by it?
- Have I actually then been to God’s house regularly to hear God’s Word?
- What impression must I give to others?...is my attendance at church...are my offerings...is my attitude in general such that I am a good and faithful witness to Christ my Savior?
- Do I represent Christ with a truly Christ-like life?
- Do I hunger and thirst for the Lord’s Supper? Do I long to receive God’s seal in this Sacrament that my sins are forgiven?
- Do I complain about what’s wrong with other people, but do not pay attention to my own many faults?
- Do I give a real offering of love, or do I give something, just to get by?
- In what I say and what I do, am I giving to others the impression that I value my membership in this congregation?
- Do I offer criticism, but not help?
- Do I truly love my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and love His Word?

If when you have answered these questions you find that you have been negligent both as a Christian and as a member of _____ Congregation, you are then urged to contact either the pastor or the members of the Board of Elders whose names and phone numbers appear on this letter, to discuss your negligence and lack of Christian interest. We hope and pray that you will take care of this matter in the very near future. We stand ready and willing to serve you by counseling you in these matters.

May God’s richest blessings rest upon our congregation; especially may He make of each of us, zealous, faith-filled Christian’s Who love to worship Him and hear His Word.

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ,

_____ Pastor
Phone:

_____ Chairman, Board of Elders
Phone:

_____ Member, Board of Elders
Phone:

Letters (D)

By the Board of Elders

Dear _____,

It is with deep love and concern for the souls of our fellow-redeemed that we, the Board of Elders, have found it necessary to communicate with you concerning the state of your Christian fellowship in _____ Congregation.

There really ought to be no doubt or confusion in any one's mind: being a member of a Christian congregation carries with it certain obligations and duties. Our church constitution which is based on God's Word, speaks of these obligations and duties, and in doing so, requires faithfulness on the part of every member.

Faithfulness to Christ and to His Church should always be motivated by love: we love Him—Christ—because first loved us, and gave Himself for us. Therefore it is out of love for our Savior that we will, for example, gladly and regularly come to God's house to worship and sing praises to Him together with fellow-believers. Close church fellowship can become a valuable source of strength and growth to one's faith in our God.

Motivated by love for the Savior, we should consider another matter very seriously: it should make each one examine himself concerning the matter of Christian stewardship. This word simply means dedication of one's time, talents and treasure to the service of the Lord. We have all received many material gifts and blessings from our gracious heavenly Father. Out of love toward the Giver we should then be most happy to return a portion of these gifts to God from Whom all blessings flow. We have banded together as a congregation also that we might work together with these gifts...to do together what we could not accomplish as individuals. This work of spreading God's Word at home and in the foreign mission fields is the great commission of the Church and must be supported...by each of us. We hope that you will prayerfully examine yourself concerning these matters of Christian stewardship.

If there is indeed a love for Christ and His Word in your heart...and yet a weakness of faith there, we stand ready to encourage you: toward regular attendance at worship services, toward regular attendance at the Lord's Table, toward a diligent practice of Christian Stewardship.

On the other hand, if there is no desire on your part to continue your membership in this Christian fellowship we feel that your intentions should be made known to the pastor and the Board of Elders. In any case we feel we must hear from you, or have a visit with you in the very near future.

Please bear in mind that our purpose in sending this letter is in agreement with that sincere concern for your spiritual welfare, which we as a Board ought to have. We pray that God the Holy Spirit—whose will is that all be saved—will work-in your heart so that His gracious Will may be done.

Yours in Christ,

THE BOARD OF ELDERS OF _____ LUTHERAN CHURCH

Chairman of the Board
Phone:

Secretary of the Board
Phone:

Letters (E)

By the Board of Elders

Dear _____,

We, the Board of Elders together with the pastor have become very concerned about your spiritual welfare due to your continual absence from our fellowship.

On _____ at ____ p.m. we as a board will be meeting in session together with the pastor to review individual cases of delinquency. We urge you to be present at this meeting for we desire to hear from you an explanation concerning the following matters:

1. Your continual absence from the worship services.
2. Your continual neglect of the Lord's Supper which Christ has given us as a gracious seal of forgiveness.
3. Your continual neglect of Christian stewardship (withholding your hand from the kingdom work of our Savior Jesus Christ).
4. Your failure to respond to Christian admonition which has been administered repeatedly in a spirit of loving concern.

Our meeting will be held at the _____. If you find it impossible or impractical to meet with us on the above date, we would—in order to be fair to you—schedule a meeting on another day. Thus, if you cannot attend please notify either of the following members of the board, or the pastor.

Mr. _____ Phone:

Mr. _____ Phone:

Mr. _____ Phone:

Pastor _____ Phone:

In the service of our Lord Jesus Christ,

THE BOARD OF ELDERS OF _____ LUTHERAN CHURCH

Signed, _____, Chairman of the Board

Letter (F)

The Board of Elders

Dear _____,

This is to inform you that at the next meeting of the congregation to be held on _____, the Voters will take action on your membership in the congregation. Your delinquency—continual failure to hear the Word of God and to partake of the Sacrament, plus action taken contrary to God's Word in

_____ warrants that we take action on your membership. It is our fervent prayer that you would repent of your ways and return to a truly Christian life and fellowship with us. If however you do not appear at the meeting to give cause for your action, the Board of Elders will have no other choice than to advise the congregation to declare that by your life and action you are to be excluded from membership in this Christian congregation.

In the name of Christ Whom we serve,
The Board of Elders

_____ Chairman

Letters (G)

By the Board of Elders

Dear _____,

With deep concern for your soul's welfare, we, the Board of Elders of _____ Congregation, write you this letter. Our fervent prayer is that God, the Holy Spirit will bless this effort of ours in your behalf.

As elders of the congregation it is our duty to assist the Pastor in maintaining a careful watch over the souls charged to his care. Just as God-fearing parents show their love for a wayward child by correcting him, even so must we in the Christian church, out of love for your immortal soul call you to repentance when you are observed falling away from the Christian faith and fellowship.

We would remind you that you have failed to fulfill your obligations and responsibility as a communicant member of _____ Congregation. You have to all appearance despised the preached Word of God and the Lord's Supper and have been an unfaithful steward of the gifts God has given you. You have thus been causing your pastor and fellow church members much heartache and concern by your deliberate neglect of those things your Savior out of love gave you—His holy Word and His Sacrament. Remember that at your confirmation you vowed to be faithful to your Savior and the Word of God until death. Your pastor and others have reminded you of this, but so far, to no avail. You continue to go the way of your sinful flesh and stubborn heart.

The picture looks dark for you spiritually, but the message of the gospel sown into a repentant heart can bring wonderful light into that heart. Never forget that the grace of God in Christ is rich to forgive sinners who come to Him with a contrite heart.

Therefore, in the spirit of God's grace and mercy, we the Board of Elders invite you and urge you to meet with us and the Pastor sometime during the month of _____. If you can meet sooner than this, so much the better. We want to sit down and talk with you and help your soul. May the Holy Spirit move you to accept this invitation and to realize how important this decision is that you will make concerning it. We might add, that membership in a Christian congregation as well as the Christian Church itself is a wonderful blessing of the Lord.

You may contact either the chairman of the Board, Mr. _____, whose phone is _____, or Pastor _____ whose phone is _____.

For the sake of your immortal soul, we pray that you will respond to this letter immediately, yes, *today*. How do we know that tomorrow won't be too late?

Yours in Christ,

_____, Chairman of the Board